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## ESL Podcast 730 – Waiting For Exam Results

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### GLOSSARY

**foregone conclusion** – expected result; a result that is certain to happen

\* The team from Eden Prairie has won the championship every year for 10 years, so I feel that this year's competition is a foregone conclusion.

**to fail** – to be unsuccessful in an exam, test, or interview; to not achieve an acceptable level; to not receive an acceptable score or rating

\* Orlando failed his driver's license exam for the third time.

**bull** – nonsense; something said or written that is stupid or untrue

\* What your teacher said about girls not being good at basketball is bull!

**to pass** – to receive an acceptable score on an exam or test; to reach an acceptable level

\* If James wants to study biology in college, he has to first pass his science classes in high school.

**on tenterhooks** – being in suspense about what will happen in the future and feeling nervous and concerned

\* Gina's doctor tested her for cancer so she's on tenterhooks until she gets the results.

**to psych (oneself) out** – to prepare oneself mentally for a future event, usually one that one expects to be difficult or unpleasant

\* Javier is psyching himself out for a month-long visit from his father-in-law.

**to ace (something)** – to excel at something; to pass an exam, test, interview or other evaluation with an excellent score or result

\* When I walked out of the classroom, I felt that I had aced the test, but then I began to doubt myself.

**toss up** – a situation in which all of the possibilities are equally likely to happen; for all options to be equally appealing

\* There are dark clouds in the sky, but it's a toss up whether it'll rain today.

**to biff (something)** – to receive a very low score or rating on an exam, test, interview, or other evaluation

\* Monique gave a presentation at work and biffed it. She forgot what she was going to say and looked very nervous the entire time.



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**to pass with flying colors** – to receive a high score on an exam, test, or other evaluation

\* We all knew that Kara would pass the exam for her electrician's license with flying colors.

**administration** – opportunity to take a test or exam; the giving of a test or exam

\* If you miss next week's administration of the college entrance test, you'll need to wait another six months to take it.

**to bomb (something)** – to receive a very low score or rating on a exam, test, interview, or other evaluation; to clearly fail

\* Last time I took this test I bombed, but I've studied hard and don't plan to fail it again.

**to squeak by by the skin of (one's) teeth** – to barely pass an exam, test, or other evaluation; to have a passing score or rating that is not considered good or high

\* Kili squeaked by by the skin of her teeth when she made the school's swim team.

**to be game** – to be willing to do or to try something; to be willing to do or try something that may require some risk or courage

\* Are you game to take sky-diving lessons with us next weekend?

**there's no sense** – there is no reason to; it is useless to

\* We've worked all night to finish this project and it's already 6:30 a.m. There's no sense going home now to return in an hour and a half for a new workday.



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### COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Joel believes that Susanne
  - a) Failed the exam.
  - b) Should take the exam again.
  - c) Passed the exam.
2. What is another way to say that someone has failed?
  - a) He or she is on tenterhooks.
  - b) He or she bombed it.
  - c) He or she aced it.

### WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

#### **toss up**

The phrasal verb “toss up,” in this podcast, refers to a situation in which all of the possibilities are equally likely to happen or for all options to be equally appealing: “We liked both apartments equally and it’s a toss up right now which one we’ll choose.” “To toss up” can also mean to throw something into the air: “The referee tossed the ball up into the air and the players tried to grab it.” Or, “The clown tossed up into the air a handful of candy and the children ran to pick up as many pieces as they could find.” “To toss” also means to throw gently: “Toss me your keys and I’ll move your car for you.” Finally, “to toss” can also mean to mix together, most often used with food: “Could you please toss that salad with some salad dressing?”

#### **to bomb (something)**

In this podcast, “to bomb (something)” means to clearly fail or to receive a very low score or rating on a exam, test, interview, or other evaluation: “Since I bombed the last test, I’ll need to study really hard for the next one if I want to pass this class.” The word “bomb” can be used to describe something that has clearly failed: “With only 15 of the 100 tickets sold for the play, the organizers considered it a bomb.” A “bomb” is an explosive device used as a weapon: “More than 10 people were killed when a bomb exploded in the city’s downtown area.” A “bombshell” is a big surprise or disappointment: “The news that Liam was already married came as a bombshell to Sheila.”



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### CULTURE NOTE

#### Professions Requiring Continuing Education

For many “professions” (jobs; fields of work), graduating college with a degree is all that is necessary to begin work. Some professions, however, require the passing of an exam.

For example, “accountants,” people whose job is to keep and examine financial information and accounts, must pass an exam to be “certified” (officially recognized) as an accountant allowed to do certain types of financial tasks. “Lawyers,” people whose job it is to do legal work, must pass a “bar exam” before he or she can do certain types of legal work.

Beyond passing an exam, many of these same professionals are required to get “continuing education.” “Continuing education” is formal study required by the government or a professional licensing organization after one has already started working in a profession. These professionals must receive a certain amount and/or type of continuing education every year or at regular “intervals” (periods of time that has the same amount of time in between, such as every two years or every six months).

The idea behind continuing education is to make sure that people in these professions stay “up to date” (knowledgeable about current events and the latest improvements) about laws, “regulations” (rules), and “developments” (new information and improvements) in their field. These requirements “differ” (are different; are not the same) from state to state, but most require “documentation” (official papers) “verifying” (officially showing) that someone has completed a certain number of “credit hours,” or hours of a course or training. Many schools or organizations providing this training are “private” (not government run), but that have received permission from a government agency or an official organization to provide training or education.

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Comprehension Questions Correct Answers: 1 – c; 2 – b



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### COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 730: Waiting for Exam Results.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 730. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Visit our website at [eslpod.com](http://eslpod.com). Download this episode's Learning Guide, an 8-to 10-page guide we provide for all of our current episodes.

This episode is a dialogue between Joel and Susanne. They're talking about a school test, an exam that they took, and waiting for the results of that exam to see if they passed it or not. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

Joel: Did it come?

Susanne: No, it's not in today's mail. Why do I bother, anyway? I know it's a foregone conclusion. I've failed.

Joel: That's bull! I know you passed. You're just on tenterhooks waiting around for the results to arrive and you're psyching yourself out.

Susanne: No, I'm not.

Joel: Don't you remember that when you came home after taking the exam, you thought you had aced it?

Susanne: I did, but that was before I started thinking about all of the questions I got wrong. Then, I thought it was a toss up whether I passed or not. Now that I've had even more time to think about it, I'm sure I biffed it.

Joel: See what I mean? You've been psyching yourself out for weeks. You studied really hard and I have no doubt that you passed with flying colors. All right, you're not going to hear today, so let's get your mind off of the exam, okay?

Susanne: All right. How?



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Joel: You can help me study for the exam. I'm taking it at the next administration. I have no intention of bombing it or even squeaking by by the skin of my teeth – like some people.

Susanne: Very funny. Okay, so maybe I'm psyching myself out – a little bit. Okay, I'm game. Where do we begin?

Joel: With all of the ones you thought you got wrong.

Susanne: What?!

Joel: There's no sense wasting all that worrying. And if you did fail it, you'll need to get ready to take it again.

Susanne: Gee, thanks!

[end of dialogue]

Joel begins by saying, "Did it come?" meaning did something arrive. We're not sure what it is, but we find out a little bit later. Susanne says, "No, it's not in today's mail (the mail that arrived today). Why do I bother, anyway (meaning why do I worry about it)? It's a foregone conclusion. I've failed." A "foregone conclusion" is a result that is certain to happen or an expected result. "The team from Albert Lee High School has won the championship every year for 10 years, so this year's result is a foregone conclusion," meaning it's obvious Albert Lee High School will win again. Well, the foregone conclusion that Susanne believes is true is that she has failed. "To fail" means to be unsuccessful in an examination, a test, or an interview, when you don't pass. "To fail" is the opposite of "passing."

Joel says, "That's bull!" (bull). "Bull" is a polite, shorter way of saying a vulgar expression. The full expression is "bull (shit)," but that's not a very nice thing to say, so sometimes in more polite conversation we just say "bull." If somebody says something to you and you think it's wrong or they're lying or it's nonsense, you'll say, "Oh, that's bull." It's kind of strong however. You would never say that in a formal conversation – never say it to your boss if you still want your job! Joel says, "I know you passed (you were successful). You're just on tenterhooks waiting around for the results to arrive and you're psyching yourself out." "To be on tenterhooks" (tenterhooks – one word) means to be in suspense about what will happen in the future; to feel nervous or concerned about something that will happen.



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Joel says that Susanne is on tenterhooks because she is waiting around; she is waiting for the results of her exam to arrive and she's psyching herself out. "To psych (psych) yourself out" is a two-word phrasal verb meaning to prepare yourself mentally for something that is going to happen, usually something that is difficult or unpleasant. "To psych yourself out" usually means that you are thinking about it, and because of the way you are thinking about it you will fail; you will not do well. You can psych someone else out; you can say things to them that will make them think about a situation or a problem or a game that will cause them to lose because of what you said. This is different than "to be psyched." "To be psyched" means to be prepared, to be thinking about something but looking forward to it, happy about it. There's a third expression, "to be psyched up," which is similar to the expression "to be psyched." "To be psyched up" means to be ready for something. But, "to be psyched out" usually means that you are thinking negatively, and because of that will not succeed.

Susanne says, "No, I'm not," I'm not psyching myself out. Joel says, "Don't you remember that when you came home after the exam, you thought you had aced it?" "To ace (ace) (something)" usually means to pass an exam or a test by getting an excellent score, perhaps even a perfect score. I very rarely aced exams when I was in school! Susanne says, "I did (I did think that I aced the exam), but that was before I started thinking about all of the questions I got wrong. Then, I thought it was a toss up whether I passed or not." A "toss up" is a situation in which all of the possibilities are equally likely to happen. A "toss up" is when you can't decide, when there are different possibilities, and they all look good. "Toss" has a couple of different meanings in English; take a look at the Learning Guide for some additional explanations.

Susanne says that she then thought it was a toss up whether she passed or not; she couldn't decide. "Now that I've had even more time to think about it, I'm sure I biffed it." "To biff" (biff) means to do very poorly, to do a poor job at something. "I biffed the exam" means I failed it; I didn't do very well. "To biff" can also mean to fall or to fail at some sort of sporting event or sporting activity. "The hockey player skated down the ice and biffed," he fell. That's another use of that word. Both ideas are similar; they relate to failure, when you biff. "He approached a beautiful woman at the bar, but he biffed when he started talking to her." That could mean that he fell down or it could mean that he failed. And if he fell down, well, he definitely failed! Not a good way to impress a beautiful woman to fall down in front of her.

Well, back to our story. Susanne says that she's sure she biffed her exam. Joel says, "See what I mean? You've been psyching yourself out for weeks. You studied really hard and I have no doubt (meaning I'm absolutely sure) that you





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passed with flying colors.” “To pass with flying colors” means to receive a high score on the test, to do very well. “All right,” Joel says, “you’re not going to hear today, so let’s get your mind off of the exam, okay?” “To get your mind off of (something)” means to stop thinking about something that you are worried about or that you are, we would say, “obsessing over,” thinking about constantly, over and over and over again, like when you biffed talking to the beautiful girl at the bar!

So, Susanne says, “All right. How?” How are we going to get my mind off of the exam? Joel says, “You can help me study for the exam. I’m taking it at the next administration.” An “administration” of an exam is an opportunity to take the examination – to take the test. If you want to go to college in the United States, you often have to take the Scholastic Aptitude – I guess they call it Scholastic Achievement Test, the SAT. Or if you study at a college and you’re from another country, you may have to take the TOEFL exam, Test of English as a Foreign Language. There are many different administrations of these exams; they give them in different places at different times.

Joel says, “I have no intention of bombing it or even squeaking by by the skin of my teeth – like some people.” “To bomb (bomb) (something)” means to get a very low score on something, usually an exam or a test, to clearly fail. It could be, however, you clearly fail something else, like that girl at the bar: “I bombed when I tried talking to her.” Your friend says, “How did it go?” “Oh, I bombed,” I did terribly. “Bomb” has a number of meanings in English, however. Some of them – not all of them – some of them are in the Learning Guide.

Joel says that he is not going to squeak by. “To squeak by” means to pass an exam or pass some sort of challenge but just barely, by a very small amount. To do something “by the skin of your teeth” means something similar to do it but just barely, to be successful by a very small amount. Joel combines these two similar ideas by saying “to squeak by by the skin of his teeth.”

So, Susanne says, “Very funny,” because Joel is saying that that’s what Susanne did. She says, “Okay, so maybe I’m psyching myself out – a little bit. Okay, I’m game. Where do we begin?” “To be game” means to be willing to try something or do something, especially something that may be a little risky or that you have never done before. “I’m game” means I’m willing to do it. Susanne says, “Where do we begin?” And Joel says, “With all of the ones you thought you got wrong,” meaning he wants to go over all of the questions that Susanne thinks she got wrong on the exam. Of course, this is not a very good way to get Susanne’s mind off of the exam, which is what Joel is supposed to be doing.





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Susanne can't believe what Joel is saying; she says, "What?! Joel says, "There's no sense wasting all that worrying." The expression "there's no sense" means there is no reason to, or it is useless to. "There's no sense talking to her, she is already married." Well, Joel says, "There's no sense wasting all that worrying," meaning since Susanne has been worrying about the exam, she should try to do something constructive with it – something useful with it. Joel says, "And if you did fail it (if you did fail the exam), you'll need to get ready to take it again." Susanne then says, "Gee, thanks!" But she says it a way that means the opposite. "Gee, thanks" is what we say when someone tells us something that they think may be useful but we know is not. For example: "Well, you don't have a date tonight. But at least you can watch baseball on television." You might say, "Gee, thanks!" meaning it's not really the same; it's not as good as having a date tonight. Although for me, I would probably prefer to watch baseball!

Now let's listen to the dialogue, this time at a normal speed.

[start of dialogue]

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Susanne: Gee, thanks!

[end of dialogue]

Our scriptwriter never biffs when she does her work; that's because it's the wonderful Dr. Lucy Tse. Thank you, Lucy.

From Los Angeles, California, I am Jeff McQuillan. Thank you for listening. Come back and listen to us again here on ESL Podcast.

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